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A profile is presented of an urban elementary school in which the building design is based on the idea of joint occupancy--the combined use of the building as a school and a public housing project. The description of the educational bases of the design emphasizes why the school was designed as it was and how it was designed and built. Schematics and photographs are included along with an evaluation of the school. (FS)

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Profiles of Significant Schools

PUBLIC SCHOOL NO. 9
BOROUGH OF QUEENS
NEW YORK CITY

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EF 003 546

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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New Ideas for School Design

Communities all over the United States are building new schools. But not every administrator, architect, and school board member can tour the country looking at the latest developments in school planning and design.

To provide people engaged in school building with a detailed knowledge of the most adventurous new schools, EFL is publishing this series of reports, entitled Profiles of Significant Schools. The reports attempt to show two things: why the school was designed as it was, and how it was designed and built. In order to do this, the Profiles will explore the educational program (which may in itself be unusual), any architectural innovations the design may contain, and any special features that may be of interest, such as air conditioning, flexibility or open planning.

These are Profiles of individual schools, built in individual communities, to house individual programs. These schools will not necessarily serve ideally in other communities, but many of the ideas incorporated in them are applicable in many places. We hope that people involved in school planning and building will find the ideas stimulating and useful.

We would appreciate your reactions to the series as well as suggestions for making future Profiles more useful.

School:	Public School No. 9 Borough of Queens New York City
Grades:	K - 1
Enrollment:	364
Architects for Housing Project:	Harrison & Abramovitz New York City
Teacher in Charge:	Marion Theisen

Setting: Public School No. 9 is one of nine units of the New York City school system which occupy space rented from the New York City Housing Authority or from private apartment owners. P.S. 9, however, is the only such unit that is a separate school. The others are annexes of existing schools. It is located in Astoria Houses, a public housing project on the banks of the East River in the Borough of Queens across the river from Manhattan.

The squeeze on land in America's metropolitan areas has led many people to re-examine their ideas of what a city school building should be.

The conventional suburban or rural concept of a separate schoolhouse surrounded by space for recreation is being subjected to stiff questioning. There is serious doubt, for instance, that it is economically wise to build a two or three-story school building in crowded cities where most private interests would build taller buildings containing more useable space.

The re-examination of the city school has led to several conceptions, one of the most important being the idea of joint occupancy - the combined use of a building as a school and for some other enterprise such as housing or business offices.

One of the most natural and promising applications of the dual occupancy principle is the joining of a school and a public housing project. The project constitutes a natural and inevitable source of children for the school. In addition, the fact that the school is part of the project contributes greatly to the project's sense of community. The people of the project are close to the school and use the school spaces after hours for community activities.

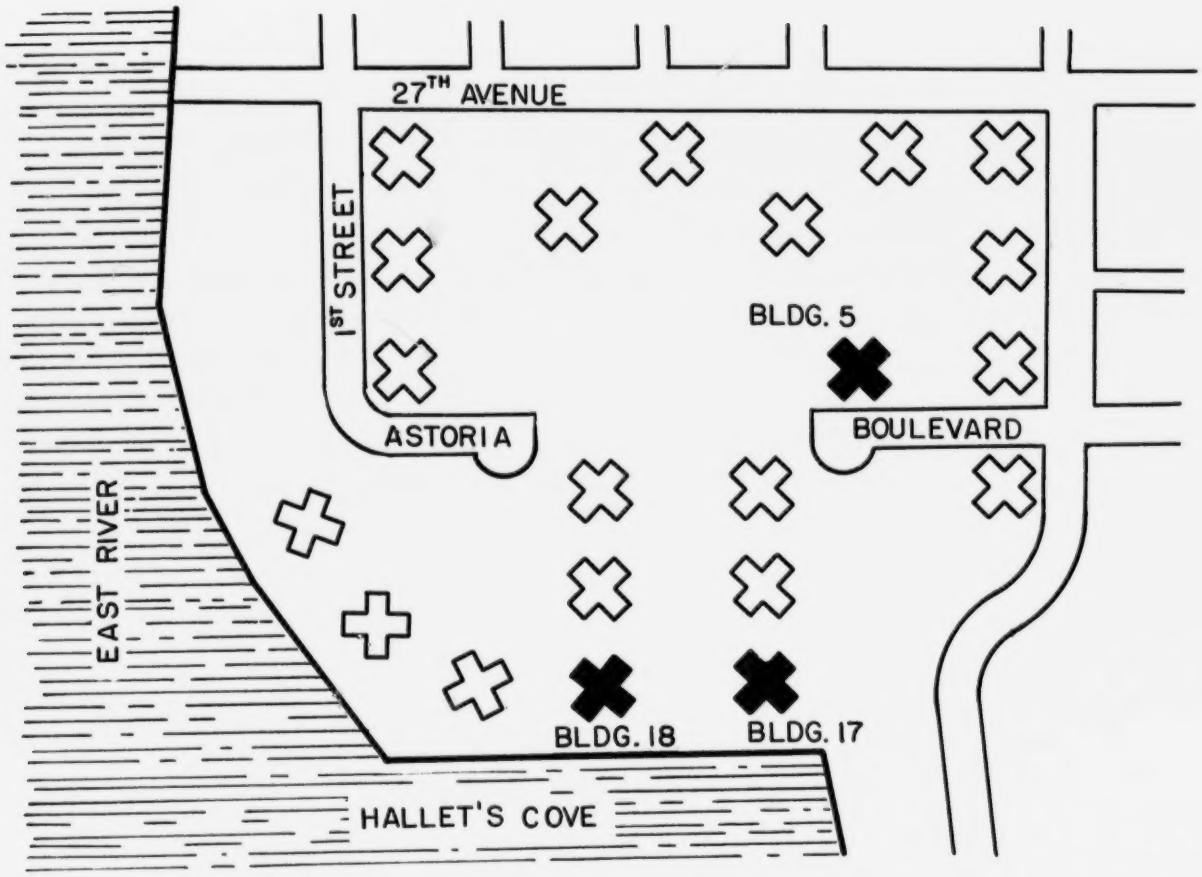
P.S. 9 in New York City is not a perfect example of such a joint occupancy. It is, however, an example that exists, an actual place where the idea has been tested. It may well be the forerunner of future schools built as part of housing projects. EFL believes, therefore, that P.S. 9, however imperfect, is an important and significant school.

A Joint Occupancy School

P.S. 9 in New York City's Borough of Queens was established in 1948 as a temporary measure due to overcrowding in the regular schools. The overcrowding had come about largely because the

public housing project in which P.S. 9 is located was a low-rent project giving preference to families - often large families.

The school started as a one-room annex to a nearby school. It was housed in a single first floor room of one building in the project. Within two years, it had grown until it occupied five classrooms and a lunchroom, taking up the entire ground floors of two buildings. In February 1950, it was formally designated as a separate school with its own teacher-in-charge. During the past 10 years, P.S. 9 has been organized in different ways. At one point it included students from kindergarten to grade 4. This past year it has housed only kindergarten and grade one. Its 10 classrooms now take up the ground floors of three project buildings. One of the units is the one in which the school started.



P.S. 9 is housed on the ground floors of three units of Astoria Houses, a public housing project in Queens.

Placing a school in a housing project has several obvious advantages, all of them present at P.S. 9 All but 6 of the school's 364 children come from the project itself - only these 6 children have to cross dangerous streets or travel any real distance to get to and from school. With kindergarten and first grade children, this proximity to the school is an important advantage.

The school has good play space just outside its doors. It uses a part of the play space provided for the project. These playgrounds serve double duty for both school and project.

Play space at P.S. 9 is the project's playground just outside the school's doors. It also serves the community at large.

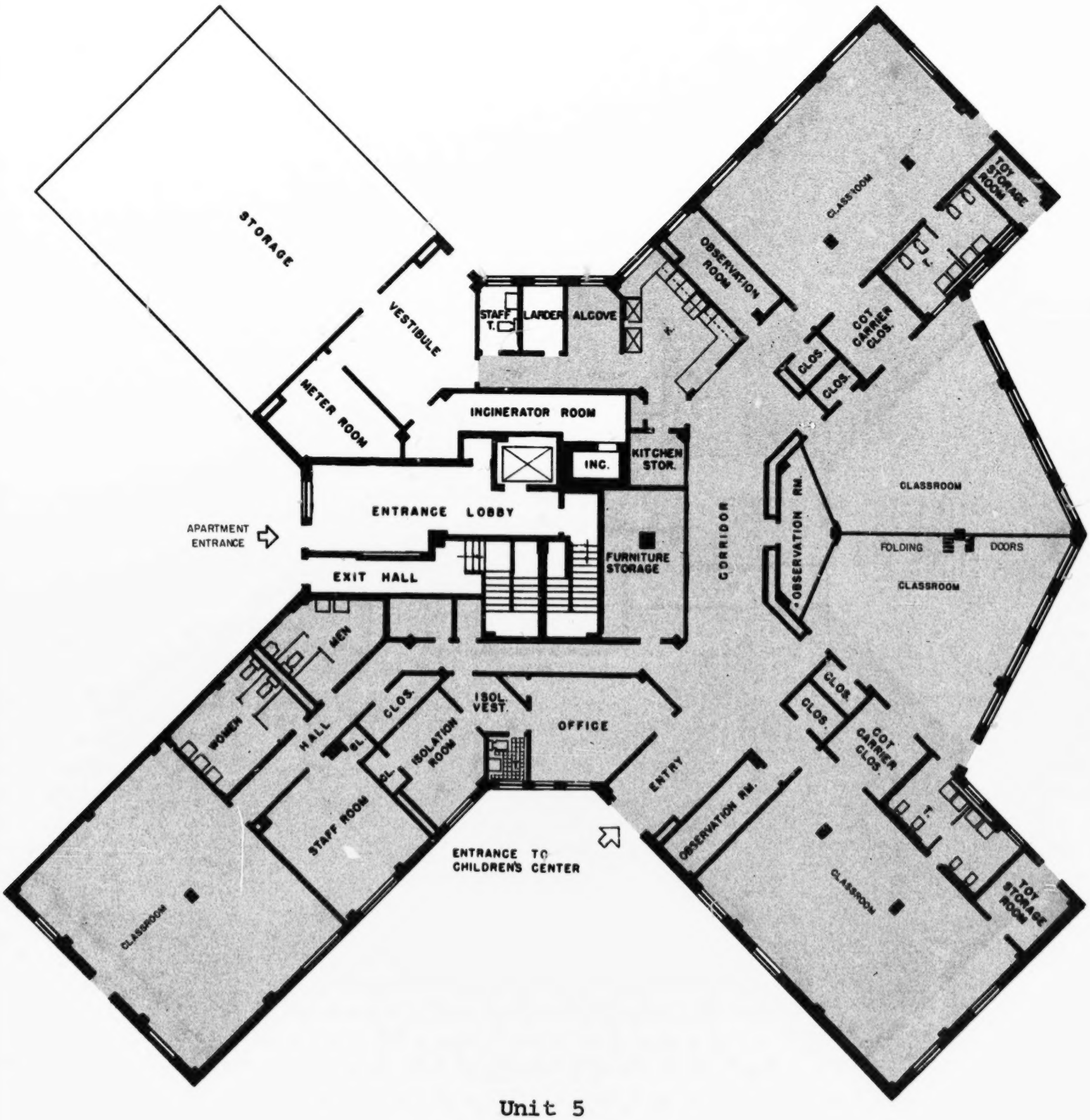
The school occupies only ground floor space, and in this project much of this space is given over to community use and play rooms rather than apartments. This means that the school and the project have a certain amount of freedom in how space is going to be used. If the student enrollment grows, the school can take over more nonapartment ground-floor rooms in other buildings. If the number of students shrinks, then the school returns the rooms it does not need to the project to be used for other purposes. If the project's population should change to smaller families or older people without children and the school is no longer needed, the school will disappear. All of its space will be returned to the project. If such a change in population happened in a conventional school situation, the school building would stand empty, wasted and waiting to be torn down.

The School

The building units at Astoria Houses are each seven stories high and are built around a central core housing elevators, the service utilities, and corridor space. Four wings containing the apartments radiate from this core.

P.S. 9's space follows this same pattern - the classrooms in each of the school's three units radiate from a central corridor-utility core. (See diagrams pages 5,6,7.)

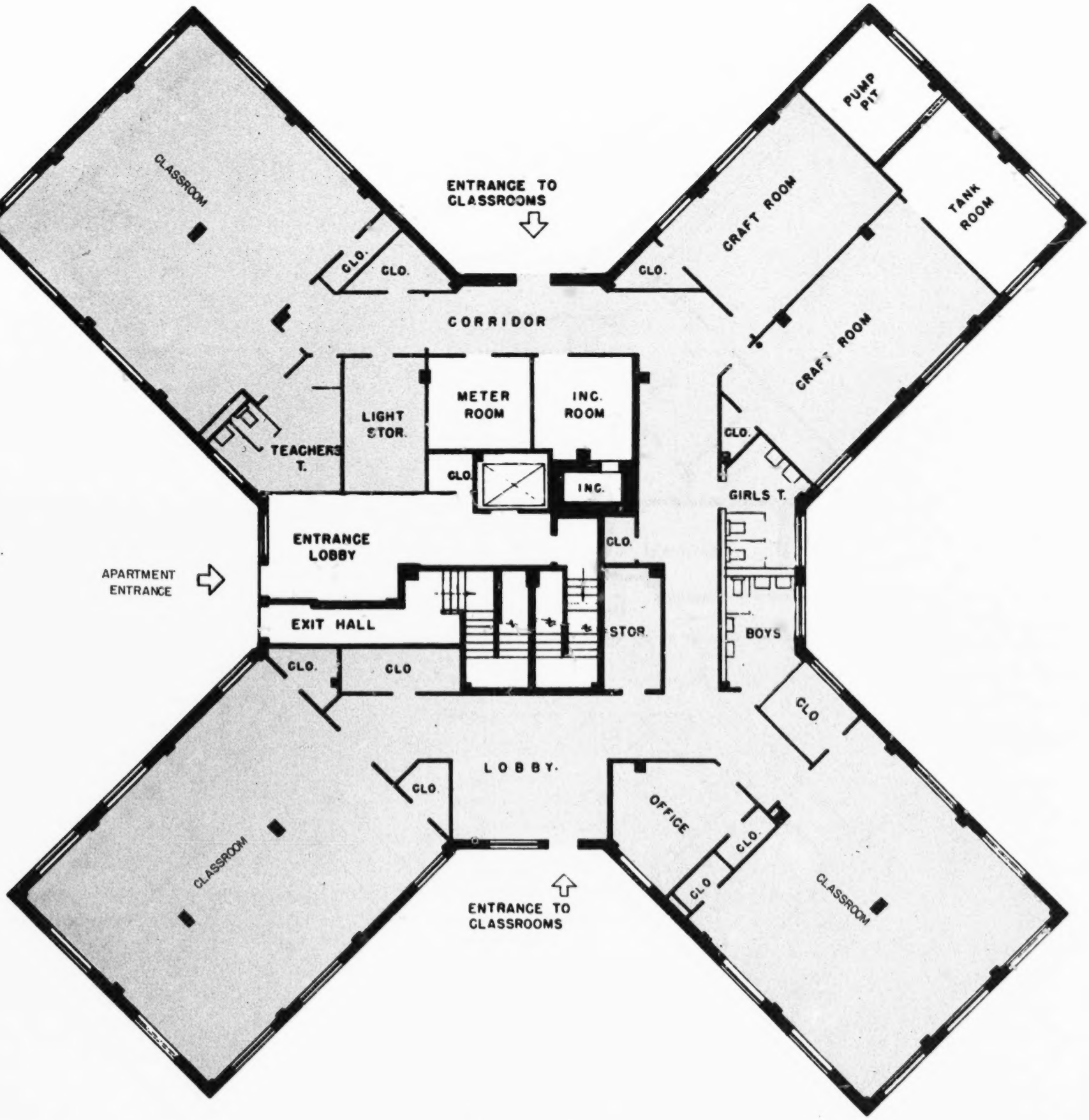
Since the space at P.S. 9 was designed originally for other uses, little of it is ideal for classrooms. Almost every room has at least one concrete column standing somewhere in it. Some of the rooms were designed to be nursery playrooms and thus are not interrupted by columns. They also have generous windows that extend almost from the ceiling to the floor. The rooms are sunny and give the children a view of the outdoors. These same windows give preschoolers playing outside an excellent view of the proceedings inside the classrooms. This is entertaining for the preschoolers but does not always advance learning inside the classrooms. This is a problem that has not yet been solved at P.S. 9. In some of the other classrooms the windows are high and small and the rooms less attractive. Otherwise the classrooms do not differ markedly from the typical New York City classroom.



Unit 5

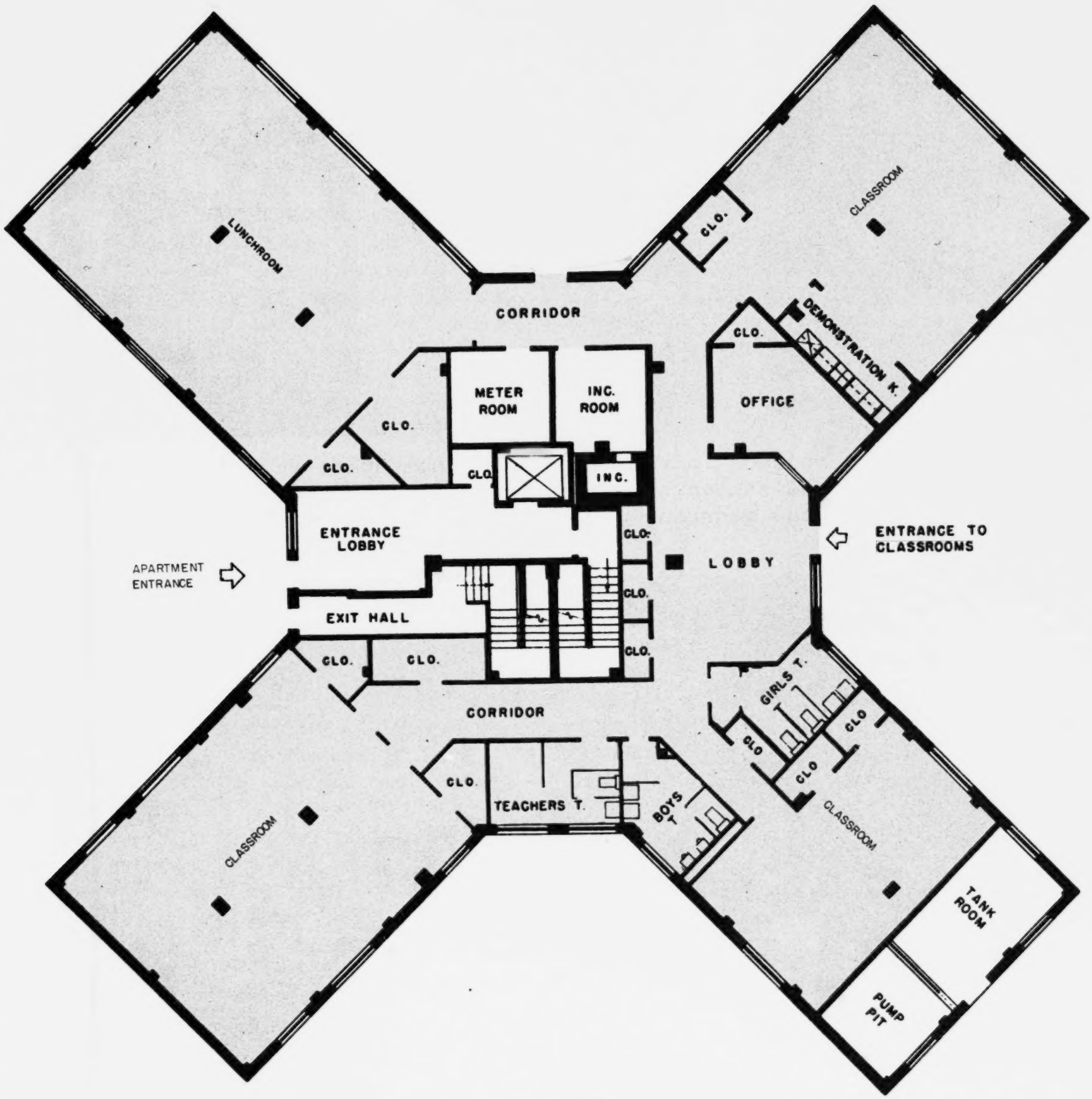
Note: Toned area is school space.

Public School No.9 - 6



Unit 17

Note: Toned area is school space.


LUNCHROOM
CORRIDOR
CLO.
CLASSROOM
DEMONSTRATION K.
OFFICE
METER ROOM
ING. ROOM
ING.
ENTRANCE LOBBY
APARTMENT ENTRANCE
ENTRANCE TO CLASSROOMS
LOBBY
EXIT HALL
GIRLS T.
TEACHERS T.
BOYS T.
TANK ROOM
PUMP PIT

Unit 18

Concrete columns intrude upon classroom space at P.S. 9, but teachers and students have learned to live with them. This classroom has generous windows, but limited display space.

Some of the classrooms have small, high windows that allow more display space but keep out needed sunlight.

One possible problem of joint occupancy is noise. Sound, traveling from the apartments to the school and from the school to the apartments, could be a problem, but it isn't at P.S. 9. The school and the apartment section of each unit have entirely separate entrances, and the thick concrete walls and the floors form an effective barrier against noise. Because there is no direct circulation between school and project and because of the effective acoustical control, there is no feeling inside the classrooms of being in an apartment building.

The physical separation of the school into three dispersed units has advantages and disadvantages.

On the plus side, each school unit forms a distinct cluster of classrooms. P.S. 9, in fact, is a campus plan school in the middle of a city. The only difference between this and a rural campus plan school is that P.S. 9's units are covered by apartments rather than blue sky. Within these clusters, the teachers work together to use their rooms and the available common spaces to best advantage. As with most cluster - or campus-type schools, this tends to create a harmonious and intimate atmosphere within the separate units.

On the minus side P.S. 9 is difficult to administer - as are many campus plan schools. The teachers make a point of having classes visit each other. The lunch room serves as an assembly hall where classes from different units get together. But this is not as easy as it might be, especially in bad weather. There is, too, the simple problem of communication. The central offices are in one building, but the other units of the school are some distance away, and there is no intercom system. Supplies and milk have to be redistributed to each unit after being delivered to the central office. The school uses the project's custodians and maintenance men, so that distribution constitutes a problem.

Most of P.S. 9's difficulties arise from the fact that none of its spaces were designed originally as school facilities.

Despite the difficulties, the school works remarkably well. Most of the problems would probably not exist if the school had been planned from the beginning as an integrated part of the housing development.

Cost and Other Considerations

Although the working relations between P.S. 9 and the management of the housing project are good, the basic arrangement has some faults. The New York City Board of Education leases space from the New York City Housing Authority at $.55 per square foot per year. This is not an expensive price for a school. The original contract for space required the housing authority to maintain the school. Some of those involved feel that it would be better if the school had its own custodial staff.

In Sum

New York City is pleased with the way P.S. 9 and the other annex-type units have worked out. At P.S. 9 the proximity of school and home has considerably improved relations between parents and teachers. The PTA has a better attendance record than the PTAs of most New York City schools. The teachers have come to know the parents well and find it easy to discuss a child's work with a parent who may live just three floors above the school itself. Absenteeism is 20 per cent below the New York City average in kindergarten and first grade.

In addition, the school has become a focal point for the project community. The schoolrooms and the playgrounds are used by the adults in the project for many more hours and purposes than in the typical New York school. In the afternoons and evenings P.S. 9 is used for adult education programs (especially English classes for the foreign-born), adult health instruction, meetings of community groups such as the Red Cross, Fresh Air Fund, blood bank, and youth activities such as the Cub Scouts and Campfire Girls. The parents also use the school for PTA meetings and social events.

P.S. 9, even with its admitted handicaps, has been so successful that the Board of Education is formulating plans to create more such schools. Administrators in the system feel that three K-3 schools in the P.S. 9 pattern in housing projects or private apartment developments could feed into a single, conventionally housed, 4-6 school, thus gaining the P.S. 9 advantages and relieving the overcrowding in the regular schools.

The Board of Education is now working on architectural designs and proposed changes in project construction methods that would make such arrangements more effective in the future, taking advantage of the inherent virtues of the P.S. 9 arrangement while avoiding the disadvantages.

Photography by

Anthony Bregman

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Profiles of Significant Schools

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Heathcote Elementary School, Scarsdale, New York
Montrose Elementary School, Laredo, Texas

Two Middle Schools, Saginaw Township, Michigan

A&M Consolidated Senior High School, College Station, Texas
Hillsdale High School, San Mateo, California
Newton South High School, Newton, Massachusetts
North Hagerstown High School, Hagerstown, Maryland
Rich Township High School, Rich Township, Illinois
Wayland High School, Wayland, Massachusetts

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